**English national character vs. Russian national character: stereotypes**

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**Introduction**

“National character” is a rather complicated term. It can be understood as historical set of sustainable national psychological traits, defining the natural ways of behaving and typical people’s lifestyle. Elements of conscious, ideology, morality and social psyche are closely intertwined in the national character. Though there are great amount of definitions of the term “national character” the majority or researchers agree that national character reflects typical national features, spiritual values, ideas and interests, religion, morality, motives of some actions, socio-psychological defense mechanisms, commitments and feelings specific to the nation. National character inextricably links a person with culture of his country, as he consciously or subconsciously absorbs the values of that culture, psychological and behavioral traits typical to that nation, as he grows older.

Stereotypes regarding the representatives of other nationalities are gradually emerging in every person’s mind. It can happen under the influence of literary and artistic works, mass media and films. The term “stereotypes” is defined in various ways. One can find the definition of it as “a fixed mental impression” or “a fixed pattern which is believed to represent a type of person or event”. Thus, it is clear that the word “stereotype” often has a negative connotation. Nevertheless, stereotypes also have some positive qualities.

The purpose of this work is to look into the stereotypes about Russian and British national characters, briefly describe each of them and to figure out to what extent they match the reality. It is impossible to underestimate the role of English language in the modern world – it is widely used in all sorts of international contacts, it is one of the official languages of the variety of international events, is universally learned at schools and universities. Even though the Internet provides everybody with a possibility to communicate with other nationalities, far of all of people are willing to do it. Moreover, cross-culture communication can simply be complicated: representatives of different cultures can have difficulties with understanding other person’s behavior, his possible reactions. This is exactly where stereotypes prove to be quite useful – they help to make predictions and to accept the “otherness” of people of other nationality. At the same time, one should still be cautious about undue holding onto stereotypes as they are just average national qualities. One should always try to see a personality in every foreigner he deals with, only in that case the communication will be successful.

So what are the most widespread stereotypes about Russian and British national characters?

**Stereotypes about Russian national character**

**Russian traits of character**

Stereotypes about Russian national character are deeply rooted in minds of many people, who have never been in Russia and have never communicated with the Russians. The stereotypes have partly formed because in the 20th century Russia was practically a closed country for foreigners. Nowadays tours to Russia are still not so popular to make a significant contribution to the changing of entrenched perceptions and questioning of existing stereotypes. Thus, foreigners can form their opinion of the Russians on the basis of the Russians they can see. It should be mentioned that the behavior of Russians while they are on holidays abroad cannot always be a characteristic from a positive angle. The contribution made by the images of the Russians in films should also not be forgotten: very frequently, directors use stereotypes to display the Russians that only reinforce those stereotypes.

**The Russians are moody and unfriendly.**

Foreigners often think of the Russians as of quite moody and unfriendly people, nevertheless, it is not exactly true. Indeed, one can rarely meet smiling people on the street, but it does not necessarily mean that people are surly. The Russians are used to smile sincerely, at relatives and friends, or at something that is truly important for them. Artificial and commercial smiles at strangers, in shops or institutions are simply not customary for the Russians. Smile is an indicator of personal favor, one should get to know the Russians better and as soon as he becomes a friend and not just another stranger, he will see that the Russians are very friendly.

**The Russians are too serious.**

The Russians are considered to be extremely serious, they prefer talking business to small useless talks. It is partly true, the Russians respect people who “do business”. It is customary to take job seriously, and if somebody often does the nonsense talks or his words do not match with his deeds he will be taken lightly. It is related not to the fact that the Russians are fond of working, but to the fact that it is common for them to separate work from pleasure? It is in their spare time when they can have fun and chat with friends. There is even a saying that is similar to a British one – “Business first, pleasure afterwards”. Also there is a quite famous quotation from the A.S Griboyedov’s novel “Woe from wit” that can illustrate this trait:

When I’m busy I mean business as a rule,

And when it’s time to play I play the fool,

And I do not belong to those

Who’re capable of doing both.

**The Russians are very hospitable.**

The Russians are thought to be very hospitable that does not match with the stereotype about their unfriendly character, by the way. It is believed, that the Russians are always delighted to meet guests, it is like a real holiday, so they will be ready to wine and dine everyone who comes on, even a total stranger. Perhaps such a treatment can accidentally be met in some small faraway village, but it is far from being true for city residents. Only relatives and close old friends are invited to homes. Homes are gradually becoming a kind of “private space” where strangers are not welcomed. Meetings in cafes replace long kitchen conversations. At the same time, if the Russians invite you to their home, they will set a great table and feed you “from the heart”.

**What is traditional and habitual for the Russians?**

**The Russians are lazy.**

The Russians are frequently imagined as lazy people. This stereotype is so long-established that it can even be called a historical one. Coming to Russia foreigners encouraged it, noting that Russian people are lazy and try to avoid work in every possible way. This stereotype is not unfounded and the Russians themselves scrupulously support it. However, it is more appropriate to talk of the fact that the Russians are not always good at managing their time and organizing themselves and that is why they often postpone their work. Nevertheless, the saying that “the Russians take long to harness but fast to ride” is extremely true.

**The Russians are communists.**

The Russians are thought to be communists who reminisce about Soviet period with nostalgia. On the one hand, the Russians take pride in accomplishments and achievements of the Soviet era and people often reminisce about old times, saying “nowadays everything is not as it should to be and in Soviet times …”. On the other hand, there are no so many true communists in Russia as it may seem to those whose opinion was formed on the basis of films. There are no soviet stars on the clothes and the diversity of political parties is quite significant, each party has its supporters, so for sure not Russians are communists.

**Russian bureaucracy and bribing.**

Bureaucracy in Russia is a very specific phenomenon and foreigners are usually horrified to understand how true this stereotype is when they face Russian bureaucracy. One should get many papers in various institutions to collect the set of documents. Quite often one can go through this system repeatedly, if there is even a single mistake in papers or some of them have become invalid while he was collecting other papers. This paperwork is one of the reasons why the Russians sometimes prefer to settle issues with bribing. According to the stereotype, one should pay off everywhere, otherwise it is impossible to get anything done. Police, doctors, officials – everybody who has anything to do with the issue one is trying to settle should be paid off. Unfortunately, Russian bureaucracy is a centuries-long phenomenon as well as bribing, though nowadays authorities try to solve this problem it will for sure take great deal of time to change the state of affairs.

**The Russians smoke and drink a lot.**

The Russians are considered the most drinking and smoking nation. For example, Chinese think that Russian women are among the greatest smokers, though they are chain smokers themselves. According to statistical data, the stereotype is quite substantiated. Russia remains very smoking country, despite all restrictions undertaken by the authorities that forbid smoking in cafes and other public places, one can hardly avoid second-hand smoking.

The Russians’ addiction to alcohol, especially to vodka, is also notorious. Foreigners think that the Russians drink vodka constantly, every day and in big amounts. Vodka replaces pure water. Doubtless, this stereotype is as true as bears with Balalaikas on the streets. It is not Russia and not even England or Ireland, but Belarus who holds the worst record, being the global leader in alcohol consumption. Nevertheless, alcohol abuse problem is actual in Russia.

**The Russians like to dress up.**

According to this stereotype, the Russians love to dress up, always try to look pretty. It is partly true, the Russians like to put on nice clothes when go out to see and to be seen. If one sees an overdressed girl with bright make-up in heels at the beach in Egypt, Thailand or Turkey there is a very strong likelihood that the girl is Russian. Nevertheless, everything depends on a person, some people feel comfortable even in simple clothes, and some just cannot go to the nearest shop without make-up and beautiful outfit. The Russians’ love for nice clothes is reflected in a saying that has its English analogue – “Good clothes open all doors”. It means that the first impression bases on person’s appearance. The end of this Russian saying is – “Clothes do not make the man”, that underlines the true Russians’ attitude to outfits – it is a person who is important and clothes are nothing more than clothes.

**Patriarchal distribution of gender roles.**

Patriarchy in mitigated form still dominates in Russia, men are breadwinners and women devote themselves exclusively to raising children and maintaining the household. It is even thought in China that Russian girls are beautiful only until the first delivery and after it they do not care about themselves, being occupied with the children, and that is why they lose their famous beauty. The stereotype about distributions of roles is partly true, women in Russia and not such feminists as European ones, they expect a man to be a provider. If a man does not pay a bill in a café a girl will most likely be offended than think that a man can offend her as a working person by paying the bill. In modern Russia women work in equal terms with men and sometimes become an earner. At the same time, it is women who are expected to look after children and do housekeeping in addition to work.

**The Russians cannot spare.**

The Russians are thought to be big spenders, to prefer expensive cars and to be unable to spare. This stereotype is rooted in Europe and Britain as there is a different attitude to expenses and spending, including the consumption natural resources like water and heat. It is hard for Europeans to understand why Russian apartments are heated so hot, that people open windows to air rooms, when it is easier to heat less and to put on some warm clothes. In Britain this stereotype formed due to those Russians who move to Britain. In general, the type of people who move there has no need to care about making economies that gave the British the wrong impression of the whole nation.

Except describing stereotypes, it is necessary to mention what Russia usually associates with – so called specific “national symbols”. To start with, bears can be classified as a Russian national symbol. Nowadays one can see them in circus, zoos and national parks, not on the streets. Also foreigners love the word “babushka” that they often confuse with “devushka” – a girl in Russian, and where they often stress the 2nd syllable. Russian doll (“matreshka”), Balalaika and hat with earflaps are other well-known Russian symbols.

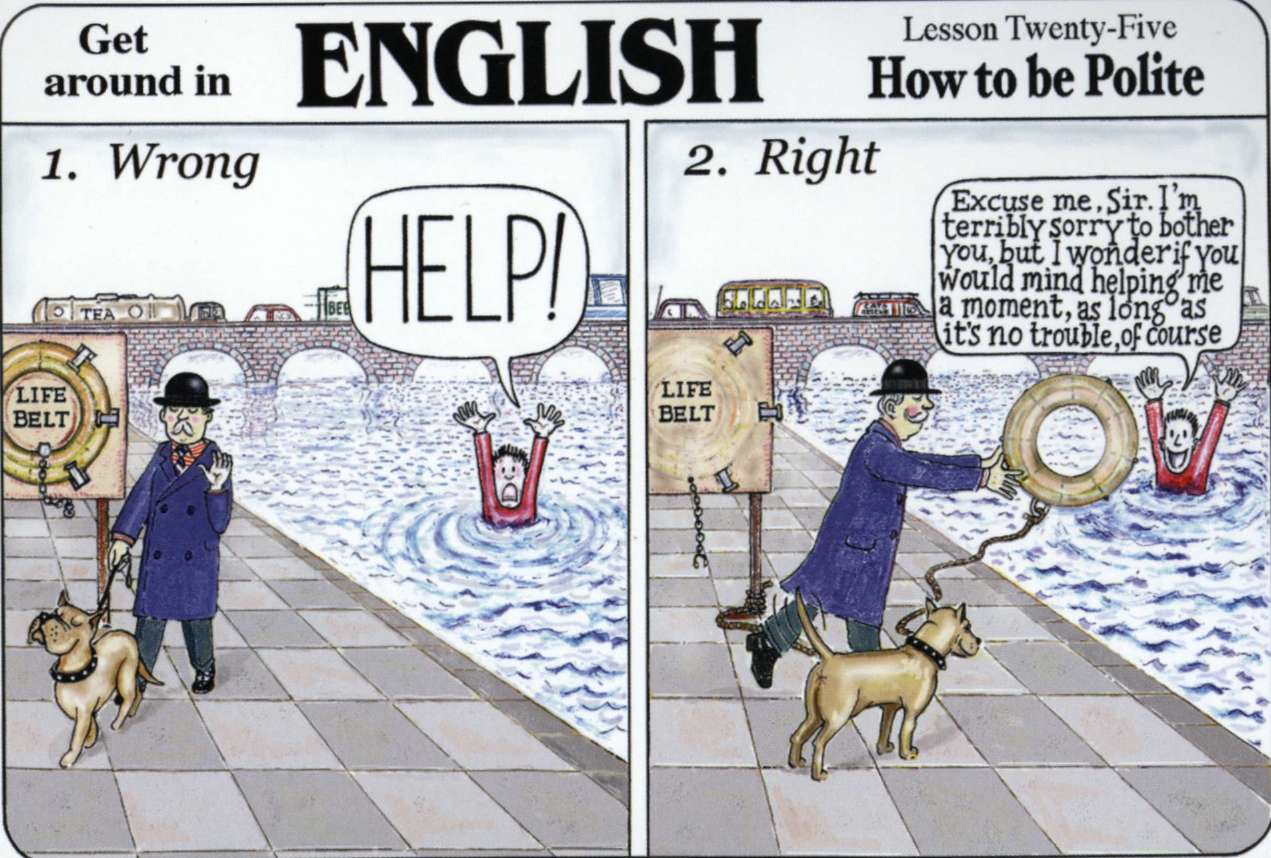
The most common stereotypes were discussed above and before giving a description of stereotypes about British national character it will be interesting to mention some obscure stereotypes, as they are quite curious. The Italians suppose that Russian men do French kissing when they meet, the French are sure that Kalinka is a female Russian name. The Japanese believe that the Russians drink warm beer (in comparison to the one they drink themselves), and that Russian “dachas”. Countryside houses – are an indicator of their wealth, profligacy and idleness. The Chinese are sure, that every Russian girl is a ballet dancer and the Americans consider all Russians to be hackers.

**Stereotypes about British national character**

**British Traits of character**

The majority of stereotypes about national character, habits and traditions of one or the other nation can be called outdated. Nevertheless, the stereotypes about the British formed under the influence of the literature, mass media, films and the remarks of those who visited Britain are quite true. The reason is British inherent conservatism. British character resembles the Japanese one, as both nations live on the islands and appreciate stability. What are the most common stereotypes about the British?

**British extraordinary politeness.**

The British are extremely polite, they often say “please” “would you” and especially “sorry”. They are ready to miss each other in the doorway. The British themselves speak of this stereotype as of a true one. The add, that they do say “sorry” very often, though the meaning of the word can vary from “I am sorry” till “What have you said?”, everything depends on tone, thus, the British do not differ significantly from other people. However, they accord great importance to public opinion, so not to say “sorry” having accidentally pushed someone is considered to be a bad manner.

**British self-control.**

The British are reserved and always exercise maximum self-restraint in displaying their emotions in public. The phrase “be able to control yourself” can be called on of their main mottos. Even nowadays the British highly appreciate the ability to stay calm whatever happens. Having no idea about this trait of character, foreigner can misjudge and take British calmness for indifference, as well as the British can take a display of emotions in public for bad manners. It should be mentioned that British calmness and self-control disappear during sport events, especially during football matches. British football fans are considered to be the most uncontrollable in the world.

**The British are punctual.**

Punctuality is more often associated with the Germans, though it is also considered a suitable characteristic for the British. The British themselves justify that it is just a stereotype as well as extraordinary British politeness. They do try to be on time, however they do not think of lateness as of something that goes beyond the pale.

**British arrogance.**

The British are vain and arrogant. This stereotype has substantial grounds. The British have a strong sense of their superiority over other nations; they can even look at foreigners with contempt, considering all British habits, traditions and items to be better. This sense of superiority is considered to have formed because the British Empire for a long time was one of the five most powerful states in the world, it had a great amount of colonies and seas “belonged” to Britain. Even now the British are famous for not learning foreign languages as people in other countries do, they have no necessity to do it as they can speak English everywhere. The British usually do not adopt other people’s habits and traditions, do not even try to get to know them better. That is how the British character identity and integrity occurs.

**What is traditional and habitual for the British?**

**British humor.**

The British are thought to have a very specific humor that often remains unclear for other people. It contains a lot of self-deprecating, black humor, sarcasm and jokes, understandable only for those with the same historical background. It means one should know British history, culture and politics and be aware of contemporary events to understand the humor. It is common to make jokes at everything and everyone at all levels of society. It is not customary to take offence at jokes, sometimes a joke can be a challenge, provoking to take actions and to disprove everything said. The British are so used to joking that it is just natural for them, even making jokes at themselves. Perhaps, it is the most self-critical nation.

**British etiquette.**

Many people suppose that the British are perfect gentlemen and always comply with etiquette. It is not completely true, there are the common rules of social conduct that everyone respects, and there is the etiquette that is observed by the Royal family and high society. Common British are simply polite to the extent described above.

**The British drink a lot.**

One of the stereotypes says that the British drink a lot that is why they have so many pubs where every British goes regularly. Doubtless, not every British visits pubs, though around 75% of the adult population often goes there and the British prefer drinking beer to ale as lots of people falsely believe. Moreover, the British sometimes so not know when to stop drinking; it is especially true about the young generation whose behavior on holidays can be watched by foreigners.

**The British are faithful to traditions.**

The British are thought to be conservators that is a quite fair stereotype. They are faithful to their traditions, follow them and try to preserve even if the only reason is to preserve their originality, for example driving on the left that is not quite convenient. The British do not want to be deprived of their national identity. Being conservative, they hardly strive to any changes and prefer to be able to see ten steps ahead. The proverb “Measure thrice and cut once” is the best illustration of their thoughtful actions.

**British accent.**

Many people who listen to BBC and speeches of British politicians suppose that everybody in Britain has charming British accent, the one that is called “posh” in Britain. The British say this kind of accent is common only for the south-eastern part of Britain and is more likely to be heard at the reception at the Palace than everywhere on the streets. The reverse is also true, not all British speak cockney it is typical only for a particular part of London. There is a great variety of accents, which can be hard for a foreigner to understand.

**Talks about the weather.**

The British love to talk about the weather it is true. One can start a conversation with a stranger with a weather discussion, moreover, it is considered impolite to ignore such statements. Apart from the fact that the weather is Britain changes very often, it is discussed because it is a “neutral” topic that does not interfere with the personal thoughts and feelings of the other person, it does not invade his privacy, while giving an opportunity to talk about something that concerns everybody.

**The British love queuing.**

The British are thought to love queuing. This stereotype is only partly true as the British are rather impatient and do not like to have to wait. Though they do not love to spend their time in queues, they respect the order in queues and consider it the height of bad manners to “jump over” somebody. It is like an encroachment on other person’s time and the British do not usually infringe other person’s rights.

**Preferences and interests of the British**

**The British dress elegant.**

The British are often associated with a “London’s dandy”. They do strictly observe the dress code but only at work. Outside the workplace they usually wear rather simple but accurate clothes. Sometimes they can look extravagant or odd, it is their way of self-expressing. It should be add that the British prefer wearable outfits to dress-up clothes.

**The British drink tea all the time.**

An Englishman and tea are inseparable in many people’s minds. Tea is considered a British national drink and every British has it at 5 o’clock. The stereotype is not unfounded, the British love tea but hardly more than Russians, for example. The substantial difference is that the British add milk into tea. The stereotype about five o’clock tea tradition was formed on the basis of literature and historical films and refers primarily to British aristocracy. Nowadays many cafes, restaurants and hotels hold such “tea ceremonies” where one can try various sorts of tea and all kinds of deserts. However, these ceremonies are mostly popular among tourists. Moreover, the British are fans of instant coffee and consume more than 30 thousand tons of it annually.

**The British love sports.**

The stereotype about British attitude to sports is true; the British do love sports, especially football, that is easy to understand, given the fact that Britain is the home of football. The game is a point of pride for the British and there are about 315 professional football clubs in Britain. The British are thought to be extremely emotional fans who are worldwide notorious for their hooliganism. In addition to football cricket is also popular in Britain it is very specific game that is not popular in other countries.

**The British love to nature and gardening.**

The British do love nature and try to preserve it, as for gardening it has become one of the most popular national hobbies. This stereotype is also true, British nature is diverse and gorgeous and British parks are known throughout the world for their artfully created illusion of “naturalness”. Gardening can be called one of the main British’s passions, there are a lot of books about gardening and even some special “gardening-tours” to Europe. The British try to cultivate their front yards and are take mowing the lawns very serious.

**The British love the Queen.**

The British adore the Queen and the Royal family. Monarchy in Britain is one of the oldest traditions, which British honor. In general, they love the Queen and understand that she is doing her job – serves to her people and country. Nevertheless, some people do not share this delight, being sure that royal family is very costly for the taxpayers.

**British food.**

Many people imagine that the British have oatmeal for breakfast every day that is not true. Modern British do not have enough time for eating something one can try in hotels as a “British breakfast”. As other peoples, they usually have just sandwiches. Oatmeal is mostly popular in Ireland and it is produced mostly there.

There is also a stereotype about British culinary tastes, many people believe that the British eat only fish and chips and other British food is tasteless. In fact, the British use less spices than other nations as they prefer “pure” tastes. They cook various meals, for example steaks, roast beefs, Yorkshire puddings and prefer potatoes, peas, cauliflower or sprouts on the side.

As for “national symbols” of Britain are umbrellas, “Financial times”, bowlers, double-deckers and red phone boxes.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, the research has shown that the stereotypes often have foundations, though some of them are already outdated or just not completely true. National characters are inseparable from the history of the nation, its traditions and cultural specificities. The knowledge of the latest will be indispensable for those who want to understand representatives of other nations.

Doubtless, there are some similarities between Russian and British national characters. Both nations are quite reserved with strangers and friendly and emotional with their friends. The important difference is that the Russians practically do not use artificial smiles and are more sincere when display their emotions and attitude to anything. The British are cool and one can easily misunderstand their true feelings.

Both the Russians and the British are famous for drinking alcohol, the British prefer to drink in pubs, where they can relax with their friends and have a great time. The Russians would more likely gather at someone’s place and organize a kind of party.

The last thing that is necessary to mention is British and Russian love to nature and gardening. British gardens and parks are gorgeous and as for Russian parks, they can be different. Some of them may look more like cultivated forests, very natural and shady with ponds and gazebos. And some parks, especially in Saint-Petersburg, are more artificial, grown under the French influence.

These two nations has some common traits of character, but there are more differences.

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